
The Road Ahead

We have heard over and over again that we live in a different world – one with new, greater and more complicated challenges – and that the only sure way to meet these challenges is through concerted and unrelenting efforts to improve public education. Our national history is rich with tales of American perseverance, ingenuity and brainpower rising to take on the challenges of each era. Through the GI Bill of Rights’ financial support for higher education, America reintegrated returning World War II soldiers into daily life and ushered in an era of unprecedented economic productivity. Through a concerted push for stronger science education in the wake of the Soviet launch of Sputnik, America landed a man on the moon before the end of the 1960s. Today, we are called upon to confront a crisis of a more silent sort: upgrading our education system in order to prepare the nation’s youth to thrive in a global society.

Our nation was born out of a commitment to a set of common goals. Our Constitution united us explicitly “in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity....” It took a Civil War, constitutional amendments and 100 years of segregation to establish irrevocably that these goals refer to all Americans, regardless of race/ethnicity, religion, gender or income. A strong education system has provided the foundation for achieving them. By failing to expect excellence in education and not giving students the support they need to succeed, we risk the principles that have made our country great, and we jeopardize the future achievements of our citizens.

In the 21st century, we are charged with simultaneously closing two sets of student achievement gaps: one at home, the other on the international stage. We must ensure that all American children – regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or geographic location – are afforded access to the high-quality schools that enable them to participate in the promised opportunity of the American dream. And we must produce more high-caliber students to compete successfully with young people overseas who can today rightfully boast of their world-class educations. Achieving either of these goals alone is a formidable task. Aspiring to anything less than achieving both is irresponsible and unacceptable.

Today, we must commit ourselves to investing the time, attention and resources required to do both. Effecting real change will require an honest acknowledgment of where, how and whom we have failed. Sadly, faced with recurrent reports of our students’ lackluster scores on international tests, too many Americans prefer to believe that problems are confined to other students in other schools in other communities. Asked to grade the schools that their own children attend, about 70% of American parents responded with an A or B in each of the last five annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup¹⁵⁶ polls of the nation’s attitudes toward public schools. Asked about the schools in their broader community, about 50% of the public believed they deserve an A or B grade. But only about 25% gave those same good grades to the nation’s schools as a whole; the most common grade awarded to our nation’s schools is a “C.” It is as if the public schools in American’s collective conscience are located in fictional Lake Wobegon, where all the children are above average.

¹⁵⁶ Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, *The 36th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward Public Schools*, Sept. 2004. Available at: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm>

We must move beyond this all too comfortable “not in my backyard” mentality and accept our responsibility, as individuals and as a nation, to educate our citizenry to the fullest of its potential. Our country’s position as an economic, political and intellectual world power is far too important to silently surrender by failing to do so. After all, our children will become our governmental and business leaders, our scientists and engineers; they will create art and literature, and they will serve as our spiritual guides and moral voices. We will rely on them for leadership in war, diplomacy in peace, and support as we age. If we invest in them now, they will repay us many times over.

Finding the Funds

This Task Force is calling for fundamental changes to our education system: starting earlier with home visits and pre-school, reorganizing and extending school time, making post-secondary education accessible to all who want it, increasing the number of high-quality teachers and principals, connecting schools to families and communities, and enhancing the existing standards and accountability systems. Real education reform will demand real resources. The National Institute for Early Education Research, for example, reports that it would cost \$11.6 billion to provide quality pre-school to poor 3- and 4-year-olds and \$68.6 billion to give these services to all children in this age group.¹⁵⁷ The Teaching Commission, chaired by former IBM chairman Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., calls for an annual investment of \$30 billion to

improve teacher quality.¹⁵⁸ These figures may appear daunting, but as we have laid out, these changes are essential to the survival of our prosperous democracy.

Although we as a society see our future embodied in our young people, our commitment to educating them is too often not reflected in education funding. Commission after commission, president after president has stated that education is the number one priority for this nation’s future. And yet, time and time again, they avoid the question of paying for the transformations that we need.

Politicians, however, should not be afraid to speak the truth; Americans have shown that they are willing to increase funding for education. Polling has repeatedly demonstrated that we are willing to spend more to provide students with a quality education.¹⁵⁹ It is also clear that Americans aren’t willing to write a blank check for education. They are aware that examples of waste and inefficiency exist in the public school system, as in the business community, other areas of the public sector, and elsewhere, and they want to be assured that their money is being spent well. We agree wholeheartedly—one reason we support high standards is that we believe they can drive the better use of funding. We support the development of further systems to reward the sound use of funds and eliminate waste. In particular, we call upon states, districts and schools to review current spending and ensure that money is wisely funneled toward programs and practices that truly make a difference in the lives of children. In addition,

¹⁵⁷ National Institute for Early Education Research, *Fact Sheet: Cost of providing quality preschool education to America’s 3- and 4-year olds* (New Jersey: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, 2005). Available at <http://nieer.org/resources/facts/index.php?FastFactID=5>

¹⁵⁸ The Teaching Commission, *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action* (New York: The Teaching Commission, 2004). Available at http://www.theteachingcommission.org/press/FINAL_Report.pdf

¹⁵⁹ 2000 University of Chicago’s General Social Survey; 2003, Committee for Education Funding Poll; 2004 Pen/Ed Week poll.

the federal government should lead the way in identifying and widely circulating best practices that leverage current spending to produce greater results.

To maintain the public's trust, we must work to make sure that education spending does what it is supposed to do – educate students. But the challenges our country and public schools face, and the road map we have laid out to overcome these obstacles, demand more than the critical changes necessary to improve poorly managed school districts. They require addressing the fact that while American schools spend more per student than most other nations, we don't spend what we need to, and far too many young people are left short-changed by a system that funnels the most school resources to students who already have the most advantages.

Schools in better neighborhoods, where property taxes are highest, often find that their budgets are sufficient because a sizable portion of school funding stems from these local sources, and they have a greater ability to attract private and corporate support. Students in poor neighborhoods, on the other hand, often must make do with schools like that of 2005 National Teacher of the Year Jason Kamras, who taught in the school library for two weeks last year while sewage leaks in his usual classroom were being repaired.¹⁶⁰ High-poverty schools like his are more likely to be urban or rural than suburban, to contain higher percentages of students of color, and to include large numbers of English language learners. In short, students in these schools look more like our population of the future. It is in all of our best interests to give them the resources that are so critical to their success while sustaining support for our already successful schools.

In the past, when urgent national needs for education improvement became clear—be they the need for public universities, vocational training, financial aid for low-income students, and more funding for high-poverty schools – the federal government led the way. The federal government will need to lead again in ways that stimulate greater state and local investments in education as well.

To begin the implementation of the recommendations made in this report, we propose a federal investment of \$325 billion over 10 years, beginning with an initial annual investment of \$7 billion that would rise to \$39 billion annually at full implementation in 2010. As our flagship commitment, we propose \$21 billion annually, at full implementation for expanding and redesigning learning time:

- \$7.2 billion to extend the school year in low-performing school districts;
- \$3.6 billion to expand after-school programs;
- \$8.7 billion in support for pre-school to provide increased access to early education to low-income three- and four-year-olds and full-day kindergarten for all children;
- \$8.4 billion to redesign and connect high school to affordable college study, in part through increasing the maximum Pell Grant by \$1,600, offset by savings from abolition of bank-subsidizing student loans that save \$7 billion.

At full implementation, we also propose spending at least \$6 billion more per year to put more highly qualified teachers in

¹⁶⁰ Greg Toppo, "Teacher of the Year: 'Let Teachers Teach,'" *USA Today*, April 18, 2005.

classrooms; \$6 billion per year to link learning opportunities with families and communities, through early screenings, home visit programs, community schools, and strengthened parental involvement; and \$6 billion for new investments in school facilities, assistance to low-performing schools, the development of national standards and high-quality assessments.

Although the investments outlined above are large, they would leave the federal government contributing only a small fraction of education budgets nationally and only slightly increase the percentage of federal spending on education. Currently, less than 3% of the federal budget goes to education; the funding we have just recommended, at full implementation, would only raise this figure by one and a half percent. Even this increase, however, would not be adequate to implement the recommendations made in this report to the extent our country needs. To achieve our full vision we call for doubling the federal investment in education, accompanied by increases at the state and local level. At the same time, we are confident that the agenda outlined here, together with renewed commitment at the state and local level, will begin a marked transformation in our schools. We are clear that if these investments are not made immediately other countries will continue to outpace us in academic, and eventually economic, achievement. This country can, and should, make our schools second to none.

Some may ask why we need to spend more on American education when we already spend the most per student of all industrialized nations. This is a fair question. But we need to look at

the component parts of these expenditures as reported by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The United States spends vastly more on post-secondary education than any other country, particularly for research expenditures in several world-class university graduate-level programs, but lags significantly behind in ensuring accessibility. It is third in spending for elementary schools and fourth at the secondary level. For pre-school, the United States falls very short. Both the proportion of children in pre-school and those supported by public funds is lower than most European countries.¹⁶¹

Our failure to spend more on preschool education is very costly since students who are not ready for school are harder and more expensive to teach later on. High levels of spending on special education are another reason that we are ahead of other OECD countries in per-pupil spending. Ironically, compared to other countries, our system is falling down at the two ends of the education pipeline – pre-school and access to college – by expecting families to pick up much of the tab. As a result, those facing the greatest challenges are often unable to participate in expanded learning opportunities before and after public K-12 schooling.

If all we were asking was for more spending on the education system of our past – the one that hasn't worked well for so many – then we wouldn't deserve to have our call answered. But we are not. We have recommended a dramatic new approach to education and a new investment paradigm by seeking increased federal dollars to leverage much more learning time and realize much higher expectations, to take aggressive steps to improve the quality

¹⁶¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2004* (Paris, France: OECD, 2004).

of teaching, and to connect with families and communities so that they can enhance their children's learning opportunities. We are convinced our recommendations, if well implemented, will work to better prepare all students and close learning gaps and are deserving of these significant investment increases.

The payoff from these investments should be substantial. For every \$1 invested in pre-kindergarten, for example, we will see a 12% minimum return and a social return of at least \$7 (and up to \$10).¹⁶² And a 1% increase in high-school graduation rates would produce savings of approximately \$1.4 billion annually associated with the cost of crime, or about \$2,100 for each male high-school graduate.¹⁶³ We fully expect that if our proposals are completely implemented American society would realize even greater savings. Students who leave their formal education well prepared will be productive workers and contributing family members and citizens. They will be much less likely to drain public resources on the results of our education failures, such as growing prison populations. And how can we quantify the return of the public schools that have nurtured inventors and scientists like George Washington Carver, or those that have fostered spiritual, cultural and political leaders

such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Maya Angelou, Cesar Chavez, and Neil Armstrong?

We, as a nation, have choices to make and priorities to set. If we truly pin our nation's economic and political future on the education of our youth, then we must weigh new education spending heavily against tax cuts and other uses of federal funds. When our nation has faced past crises, we have found the funds to respond, and we now face a threat as serious as any military challenge. As society expects our schools to do more than before, and as parents and employers demand stronger scholastic achievement, we must commit to providing the resources necessary to meet these demands.

That we can afford this level of investment to secure our nation's future is clear when compared to the Administration's current budget priorities. When the current Administration's tax cuts for the wealthiest 1% are fully phased in, we will face an estimated \$83 billion annually in lost revenue by 2010.¹⁶⁴ If the estate tax is repealed, as the Administration has proposed, we are projected to lose about \$67 billion per year by 2014, about the current level of federal education spending.¹⁶⁵ Compared to these discretionary expenses, our proposal to initially spend

¹⁶² National Institute for Early Education Research, "Federal Reserve Economist Urges Much Wider Public Investment in Preschool," *Preschool Matters* vol. 1, no. 3, December 2003,

¹⁶³ Lochner, Lance and Enrico Moretti, *The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests and Self-Reports* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Nov. 2001).

¹⁶⁴ The Tax Policy Center estimates that the 2001-2003 tax changes will cost \$276 billion in 2010 including interest rates (see W. Gale and P. Orszag, "Bush Administration Tax Policy: Revenue and Budget Effects," *Tax Notes*, October 4, 2004 at 105. Available at: http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/UploadedPDF/1000695_TaxBreak_100404.pdf). Of this, an estimated 30 percent will go to the top 1 percent of taxpayers (see W. Gale and P. Orszag, "Bush Administration Tax Policy: Distributional Effects," *Tax Notes*, September 27, 2004 at 1559. Available at: http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/UploadedPDF/1000689_TaxBreak_092704.pdf)

¹⁶⁵ Congressional Budget Office, "An Analysis of the President's Budgetary Proposals for Fiscal Year 2006," March 2006. Available at: <http://cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=6146&sequence=1>. The 10-year cost of extending the estate tax repeal past 2010 is estimated to be \$290 billion; however, this estimate only contains four years of full repeal.

an additional \$39 billion annually at full implementation in 2010, which amounts to \$584 annually per student, seems like very little to ask in exchange for our nation's future.

Investments aside, our schools also bear responsibility to use funds wisely. Administrators and policymakers must ensure that money is spent in the most efficient and effective manner. The recommendations put forth here have been selected with these goals in mind. Some, such as universal pre-school and a sustained focus on literacy, are the educational equivalent of a flu shot. They may ward off not only the flu today, but also prevent a very expensive epidemic down the road.

A Role for Everyone

But providing a world-class education system for all is about more than money. The fundamental improvement we seek will not be the product of sporadic and fragmented responses from an apprehensive few. If we truly believe that education is critical for our nation's continued success, then all of our citizens have important and sustained roles to play in nurturing a nation of learners. Because this report contains several recommendations for state- and federal-level policymakers, we offer the following words to our nation's learners and to those closest to them.

A Call to Parents

Even before their children are born, parents set the tone for the role of education in their children's lives. By taking an interest in their children's education and creating a positive home environment, parents can help instill in their children a lifelong love of learning.

1. Early childhood education, particularly pre-literacy, plays a significant role in the educational success of your children. By

the time children enter kindergarten, they should be able to complete three of the following four literacy school readiness activities: recognizing letters, counting to 20 or beyond, writing their names, and reading or pretending to read.

2. Healthy children are better positioned to be academically successful children. Ensuring that your children have received the proper immunizations, and having your children screened for potential learning disabilities before they enter kindergarten is vital.
3. Parental involvement helps promote your child's success. Become familiar with your child's teacher; the services, programs and activities available through your child's school; and even the academic performance of your child's school overall. Working with your children and letting them know that you are engaged in their academic achievement speaks volumes.
4. Establishing high aspirations is the first step in reaching goals. Set high expectations for yourself, your children, your children's school and your children's teachers. Expect that through their educational experiences your children will become eager, disciplined and thoughtful learners, with the skills and knowledge to do meaningful work and contribute to their family, community and nation.

A Call to Teachers

Teachers play an indispensable role in ensuring that their students are equipped with a fundamental set of knowledge and skills. Charged with educating our youth, the future of our nation literally resides in your hands.

1. Just as students are continually learning and evolving, so are teachers. Activities to enhance subject-matter mastery and teaching strategies are essential. Teachers are the single most important factor in the educational attainment of children. Your preparation should be second to none.
2. Literacy, numeracy, comprehension and critical thinking improve with time and practice. Teachers must engage each student individually in order to help them reach their fullest potential, always setting the highest expectations possible for them.
3. Acknowledge and utilize the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of your students as a learning tool. Every experience presents a learning opportunity.¹⁶⁶
4. Reach out to parents and families early and often. Cultivating relationships and establishing respect and trust are essential. These are the keys to opening the door to parental involvement.
2. Teachers play a vital role in helping children reach their fullest potential, and we as a society benefit greatly from their efforts. Too often, however, their hard work goes underappreciated or unrecognized. If we are to continue to attract and retain the best teachers for our children, we must honor and respect teachers as professionals. The President, leading members of Congress, and media outlets of all kinds must make a sustained effort to acknowledge the crucial role that teachers play in our world and to recognize in public ways the performance of superb teachers and school administrators.
3. Establishing local partnerships among businesses, social service providers, local elected officials, and schools is a wonderful way to create a strong support network for learners. Cultivating these collaborative relationships relies on placing children first – before the needs and concerns of adults.
4. We all have something to teach and something to give; we have a responsibility to the greater community. Support of local education initiatives and mentoring programs for the children living in your community strengthen the base of children’s support networks and increase their chances for success.

A Call to Community Members

It is not enough that parents and family members, or teachers and school administrators, support children as they learn. Elected officials, business leaders, government agencies, advocacy organizations, and individual citizens alike are a necessary part of the equation.

1. Our future as individuals and as a nation depends on the high-quality education of our children. It benefits us all to invest in this education and to ensure equal educational opportunities for all.

A Call to Students

Just as adults expect excellence in education, so should students. As the country’s future leaders, students of all ages must rise to the occasion. The nation depends on it.

¹⁶⁶ For more on how one teacher has helped immigrant students reach their fullest potential, see: Bob Chase, “Chauncey’s Children,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2002.

1. Education is an opportunity and it is the personal responsibility of each student to work hard and take full advantage of it. It is equally important to make the personal commitment to strive for success.
2. Education can also be a challenge. Don't give up; perseverance will take you far. You are not in this alone; there are people who support you – whether you know them or not.
3. Education is a lifelong process. Remember your duties and responsibilities to your community and society at large. Share the knowledge you gain; teaching or mentoring others is a great way to do so.

A Call to Action

To be sure, the road ahead will be long and often difficult. But it is not a course entirely uncharted. In exemplary programs and in

extraordinary people, we have seen that even the saddest, most neglected schools can be turned around and their students infused with confidence in their abilities, pride in their performance and eagerness to seize a future that is filled with possibilities. Let these findings and recommendations accelerate awareness and inform action over the extended time it will take to generate a new, robust and truly world-class system of education. Let them serve as a guide to the road ahead.

Americans have time and time again demonstrated the capacity to navigate change; for us it is now a matter of will. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “(t)here is no easy way to create a world...where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if such a world can be created in our lifetime, it will be done in the United States...by people of good will.” We must once again summon the resolve to remake our world: our future depends on it.